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ABSTRACT

In fall 1996, California's Los Rios Community College District (LRCCD) undertook several initiatives to increase enrollment, including the construction of state-of-the-art computer laboratories to meet demands for high tech training and the expansion of course offerings to non-traditional times. To evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts, surveys were sent to 9,424 students attending LRCCD for the first time in spring 1997, requesting information on how they select classes, their satisfaction with their college and student services, and their scheduling preferences. Study findings, based on responses from only 14% (n=1,323) of the students, included the following: (1) the most important reasons for selecting classes were to gain job skills or to work towards a degree or certificate; (2) 82.6% agreed or strongly agreed that the classes they took in spring 1997 met their educational needs, compared to only 9.8% who disagreed or strongly disagreed; (3) 78.7% felt that their instructors were effective, while 77.5% agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to get the classes they wanted; (4) 52.5% indicated that weekday evening classes were convenient, 37.5% weekday mornings, and 33.7% weekends; and (5) 57% preferred classes that last the traditional 18-week semester. (BCY)

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A Survey of New Students in Spring 1997

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Los Rios Community College District
Office of Planning and Research

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Los Rios Community College District
Office of Institutional Research

A Survey of New Students in Spring 1997

October 1997

Beginning in mid-Fall 1996, staff of Los Rios Community College District and its colleges implemented several new efforts to increase enrollment in Spring 1997. These initiatives included the building of two new state-of-the-art computer laboratories to meet the demand of high tech computer training and the expansion of course offerings at more non-traditional evening and weekend times. The primary objective of these efforts was to meet student and area worker training needs more comprehensively *and* conveniently than during previous semesters. Staff also implemented a new marketing campaign to inform potential students about the new course offerings. In an effort to evaluate the success of these new initiatives, staff in the District Office of Institutional Research conducted a new student survey in the Summer of 1997. What follows is a discussion of the results of that survey.

A Demographic Profile of Spring 1997 New Students

The survey of new students in Spring 1997 was sent to all new students who attended a Los Rios Community College District center or college during Spring 1997. Of this group, 35.9% attended ARC, 26.1% attended CRC, and 38% attended SCC. A profile of these students illustrates that the majority were female (53.0%) compared to the lower proportion of males (47.0%).

The ethnic composition of the District's new student population in Spring 1997 is as follows: African American, 10.3%; Asian, 12.7%; Latino, 11.5%; Native American, 2.3%; white, 59.2%; and 4.0% are from various other ethnic groups. The age distribution of new LRCCD spring students follows: 0.6% were under 18, 19.1% were 18 – 20, 17.0% were 21 – 24, 14.3% were 25 – 29, 23% were 30 – 39, and 26.1% of first time students in Spring 1997 were 40 and over.

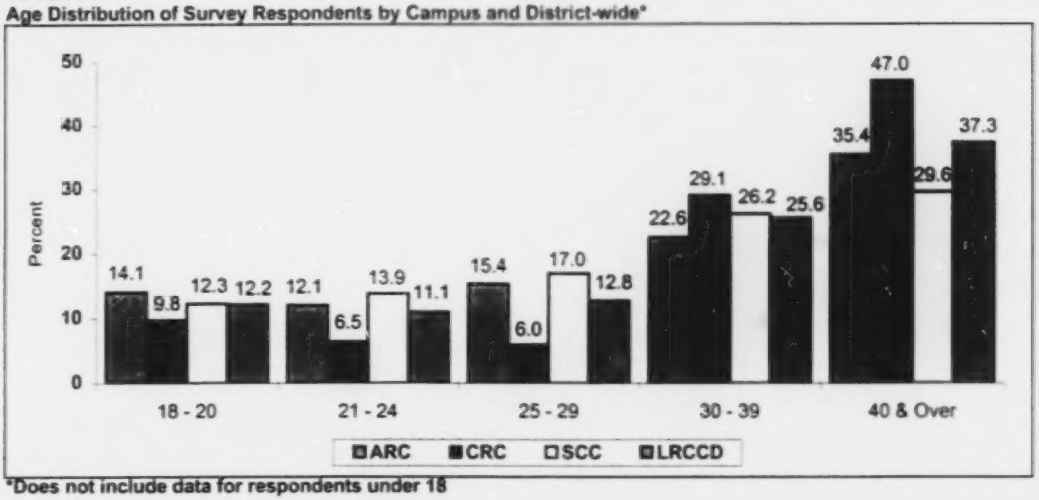
1997 New Student Survey Respondent Profile

After adjusting for undeliverable mail, the survey population included 9,424 students. Responses were returned by 1,323 students. Although the response is low (a 14.0% rate of return), we are able to gain valuable information from those students who did take the time to respond. Because of the low response rate, the following analysis is *not* generalized to *all* new Spring 1997 students; it represents the opinions of only those students who did respond.

The campus profile of survey respondents follows: 38.8% were from ARC, 31.2% from CRC, and 30.0% from SCC, which is slightly different than the comparable profile of *all* new students. Proportionately, more ARC and CRC students responded, while fewer SCC students responded. The majority of survey respondents were female (65.2%) which is higher proportionally than the female gender profile of new students (53.0%) district-wide.

Chart 1 demonstrates the age diversity among the survey respondents at each of the three Los Rios colleges as well as the proportional distribution district-wide: This distribution is weighted towards the older age categories, with 62.9% of all respondents 30-and-over. This compares to the lower 49.1% proportion of *all* new students in this same age category in Spring 1997.

Chart 1
Age Distribution of Survey Respondents by Campus and District-wide*



*Does not include data for respondents under 18

It is of interest to note that CRC has a substantially higher proportion of survey respondents (76.1%) and new Spring 1997 students (59.9%) who are 30 years of age and older, compared to the other colleges and the District. The CRC student population includes those students who are enrolled at the El Dorado and Folsom Lake centers.

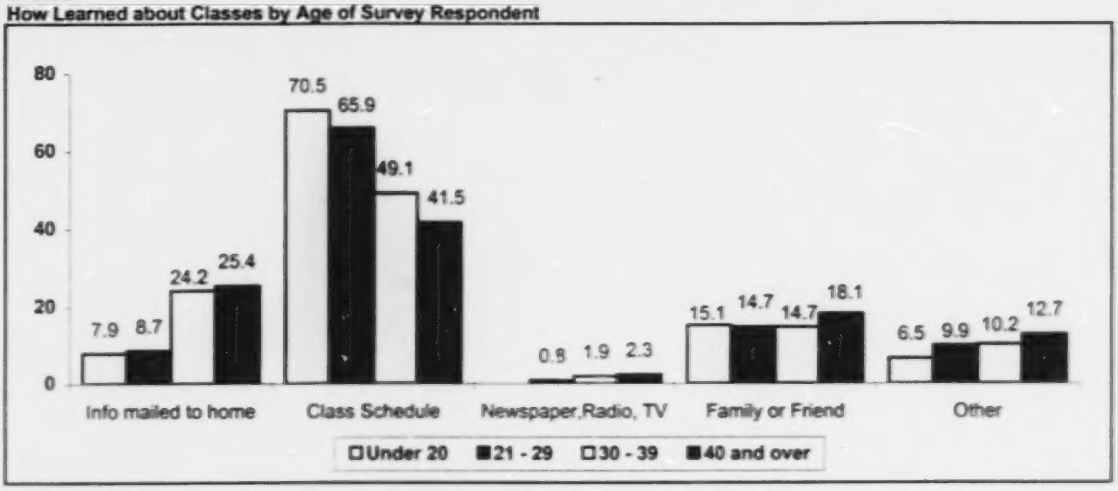
White students responded to the new student survey in higher proportions both at the district level (66.7% vs. 65.5%) and by college than the comparable proportions of *all* new students: ARC, (69.9% vs. 65.5%); CRC (71.6% vs. 64.5%); and SCC (56.5% vs. 49.5%). The remaining distribution of LRCCD survey respondents based on ethnicity follows: Asian, 13.9%; Latino, 7.7%; African American, 6.5%; Native American, 1.8%; and the remaining 3.3% are from various other ethnic groups or did not specify their ethnicity.

How and Why Survey Respondents Selected Spring Classes

The majority of survey respondents (52.8%) learned about their classes through the class schedule obtained at a college, center, area bookstore or via the Internet. Nineteen percent of respondents learned about the classes they took from information mailed to their home, 16.4% from family or friends, 10.3% from other sources and 1.6% learned about classes through newspaper, radio or TV.

As illustrated in Chart 2, younger students (those 29-and-under) who responded to the survey tended to use the class schedule as their vehicle to learn about offerings they took in higher proportions than older respondents (those 30 and over), 67.5% and 44.5%, respectively. Respondents 30-and-over learned about classes from information mailed to their home in higher proportions (24.9%) than younger survey respondents (8.4%).

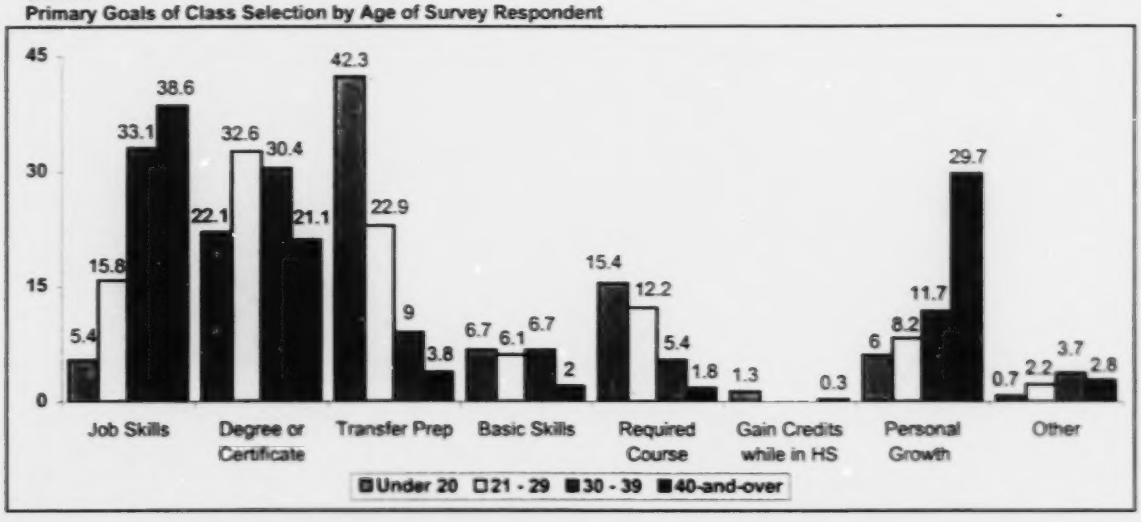
Chart 2
How Learned about Classes by Age of Survey Respondent



The most important reasons for selecting classes to the largest number of respondents were to either gain job skills (27.2%) or work towards a degree or certificate (26.6%). The remaining respondents indicated their objectives for attending LRCCD were as follow: personal growth, (16.3%); preparation for transfer to another college or university (15.2%); completion of courses required by a specific college or university program (7.0%); basic skills improvement (5.0%); or other (2.5%).

Analysis by age as illustrated in Chart 3, suggests that transfer preparation was the primary goal for class selection of respondents 20-and-under (42.3%), while 22.1% selected classes to work towards a degree or certificate. In comparison, more respondents 21 – 29 selected classes to work toward a degree or certificate in higher proportions (32.6%) than for transfer preparation (22.9%).

Chart 3
Primary Goals of Class Selection by Age of Survey Respondent



There is a fairly even distribution of those respondents 30 – 39 who selected classes to gain job skills (33.1%) and to work towards a degree or certificate (30.4%). Only 9.0% of respondents 30 – 39 selected classes for transfer preparation. Selection of classes to gain job skills was the primary reason respondents 40-and-over selected classes (38.6%). Respondents aged 40-and-over also selected classes for personal growth (29.7%) in higher proportions than each of the other age categories.

Analysis of class selection by ethnicity shows some interesting information. Half of the Native American respondents selected classes to gain job skills, a much higher proportion than found in any other ethnic group. This can be attributed to the small size in the number of Native American respondents (22). African American respondents selected courses with the intent to work on a degree or certificate (37.5%)

in higher proportions than was found in other ethnic groups. Interestingly, 16.3% of Asian respondents selected classes to complete a course requirement at another college or university program; this proportion is much higher than is the case for any other ethnic group.

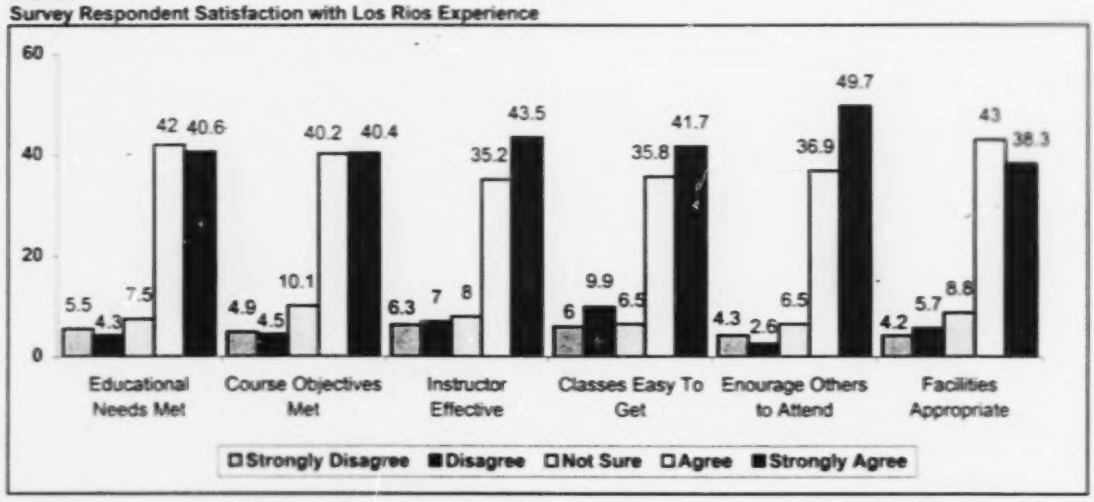
Selection of courses based on the gender profile of survey respondents shows some interesting differences in proportional distributions. The primary reason a large number of female respondents selected their classes is to work towards a degree or certificate (30.6%). This compares to the lower 18.9% of males working towards a degree or certificate. The proportion of females selecting classes for transfer preparation is 16.9%, while for males the proportion is 11.7%. Male respondents selected classes in higher proportions to gain job skills compared to female students: 32.9% and 23.9%, respectively. It is of interest to note that male respondents selected classes for personal growth (20.5%) in higher proportions than did female respondents (14.3%).

Respondent Satisfaction with Los Rios Experience is High

As demonstrated in Chart 4, respondent satisfaction with the Los Rios college educational experience is exceptionally high. When asked if their educational needs had been met, an overwhelming 82.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the classes they took in Spring 1997 met their educational needs. In comparison, only 9.8% of survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that their educational needs had been met, while 7.5% were not sure. This high level of satisfaction is supported in the review of respondents comments in which 8% of all comments were positive, compared to 3.8% which were negative.

Similarly, when asked if stated course objectives had been met, 80.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Comparatively, 9.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 10.1% were not sure that stated course objectives had been met. For the most part, responses evaluating the meeting of educational needs and course objectives are evenly distributed based on age, ethnicity and gender of respondents.

Chart 4
Survey Respondent Satisfaction with Los Rios Experience



A large majority (78.7%) of respondents felt their course instructors were effective, with only 13.3% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that their instructors were effective. The remaining 8.0% were not sure about the effectiveness of their course instructor. Responses evaluating instructor effectiveness based on age, ethnicity and gender profiles are evenly distributed. Native American response to instructor effectiveness is worth commenting on, remembering the proportions are influenced by the small size in the number of Native Americans. Although a majority of Native American respondents agreed (59.1%) their course instructor was effective, there is a higher proportion of Native Americans who disagreed (22.7%) their course instructor was effective than any other ethnic group.

Over three quarters (77.5%) agreed or strongly agreed, 15.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 6.5% of respondents were not sure that it was easy to get the classes they wanted. There are some differences in feelings on the ease for getting classes based on age. Of those respondents 21-and-over, 78.7%

agreed or strongly agreed it was easy to get classes. Comparatively, the proportion of respondents 20-and-under who felt this way was a lower 67.7%.

A near majority (49.7%) of respondents *strongly* agreed they would encourage others to attend the Los Rios college or center they had attended, and the proportion who *agreed* they would was 36.9%. Only 6.9% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would encourage others to attend and 6.5% of survey respondents were not sure. The proportional distribution of Asian respondents who agreed or strongly agreed on this issue is slightly lower than is the case for each of the other ethnic groups. Almost 77% of Asian respondents would encourage others to attend the Los Rios college or center they attended, compared to the 88.4% average for all other ethnic categories.

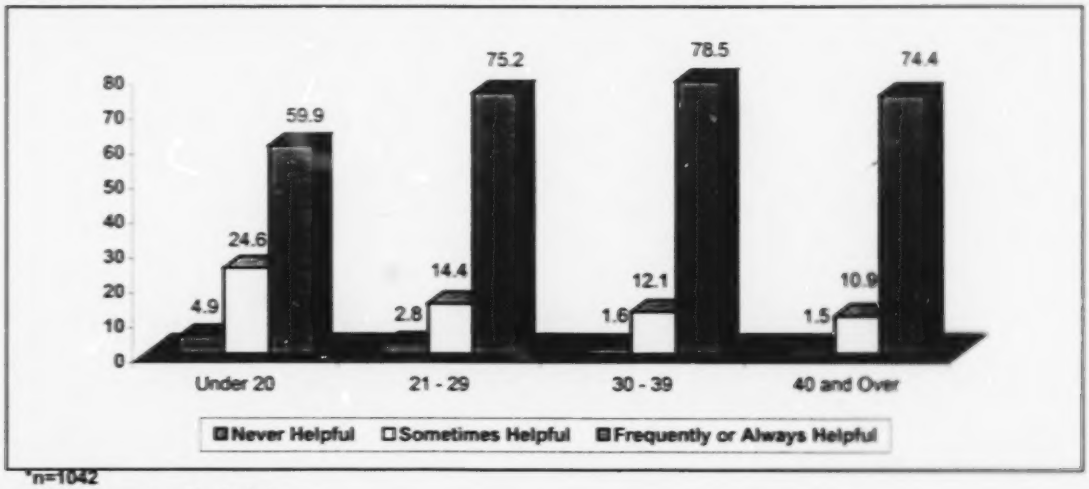
Agreement and strong agreement that educational facilities and equipment used were appropriate for the class the student enrolled in were the responses of 81.3%. "New technology facilities are outstanding," is an example of students' positive comments on facilities and equipment. Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that facilities and equipment were appropriate made up only 9.9% of the respondents, with 8.8% not sure. The vast majority of negative feedback given by students who took the time to comment focused on art facilities that are lacking and uncomfortable and broken physical education facilities.

Positive Outcome of Student Services Evaluation

The objective of the next series of questions was to measure the overall satisfaction with student services within the Los Rios Community College District. The following analysis is based on responses of those students who had actually used the services being measured. It is important to note that other than admissions and registration services and instructor evaluation, the majority of students (ranging from a low of 58.4% to a high of 84.9%) did not evaluate the service because it was not used. Responses about student services based on gender are fairly evenly distributed, but there were some response differences based on age and especially upon ethnicity.

Of those respondents (74.5%), who used the services of Admissions and Registration staff, 73.2% felt the staff was frequently or always helpful, 14.5% felt the staff was sometimes helpful, and 2.3% responded that the staff was never helpful.

Chart 5
Evaluation of Admissions and Registration Staff by Survey Respondent's Age*



*n=1042
NA responses not included

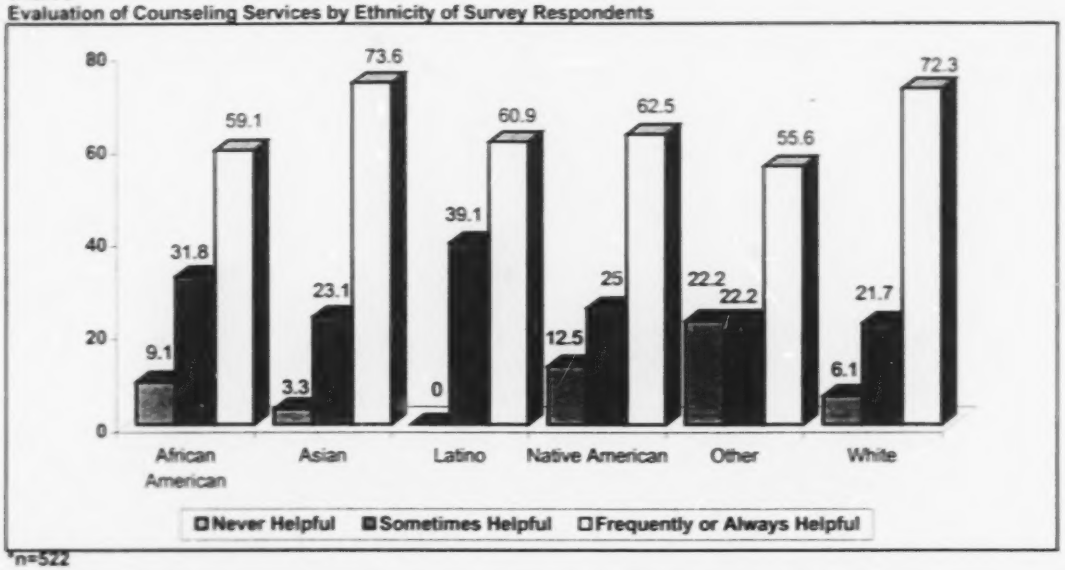
Chart 5 demonstrates the results of the evaluation of the Admissions and Registration staff services by age category. Respondents in all age categories except those under 20 indicated Admissions and Registration staff were frequently or always helpful (ranging from 74.4% to 78.5%). But for respondents under 20, the proportion that felt Admissions and Registration staff were frequently or always helpful is a lower 59.9%. Perhaps younger students need more support in the admissions process than do older students who may have gained similar experience elsewhere.

Of the 78.2% of respondents who evaluated their instructors, approximately one-half viewed their instructors as always helpful and 29.2% felt their instructors were frequently helpful. There were 14.5% of respondents who felt their instructors were sometimes helpful and 2.8% thought they were never helpful. Although, the majority of respondents 20-and-under felt instructors are frequently or always helpful (70.9%), this is lower than is the case for each of the other age categories (ranging from 77.6% to 85.6%).

Of those students (41.6%) who utilized the services of Los Rios counselors, 42.5% felt that counselors were always helpful, 27.2% answered they were frequently helpful, 24.3% responded they were sometimes helpful, and 6.0% responded they were never helpful. An evaluation of the complaints of respondents who chose to make additional comments to the survey shows that students are most concerned and frustrated with their inability to make counseling appointments at the counseling centers.

There is a distinct difference based on age in the evaluation of counselors. Respondents 30-and-over feel counselors are frequently or always helpful (75.9%), which is higher than the proportion of students 29-and-under (63.3%). There are some differences based on ethnicity, as well. Although for each of the ethnic groups the majority of respondents feel counselors are frequently or always helpful, there is a substantial proportion who feel counselors are sometimes helpful as shown in Chart 6. For example, 39.1% of Latinos, 31.8% of African Americans, and 25.0% of Native Americans felt counselors were sometimes helpful.

Chart 6
Evaluation of Counseling Services by Ethnicity of Survey Respondents



*n=522

The evaluation of special programs (EOP&S, DSPS, GAIN, veterans, financial aid officers, etc) resulted in the following breakdown by the 22.5% of respondents who used the services: always helpful (39.3%), frequently helpful (27.2%), sometimes helpful (25.2%), and never helpful (8.4%). Special Programs staff were felt to be frequently or always helpful by 72.5% of respondents aged 21 – 29 and by 71.2% for those 40-and-over. In comparison, the staff was felt to be frequently or always helpful by 62.8% of respondents under 20 and by 62.0% of those 30 – 39. Over 60% of both Latino and Asian respondents felt the special programs' staff were frequently or always helpful; 74.8% of white respondents felt the staff were frequently or always helpful. Lower proportions of Native American and African American's felt special programs' staff were frequently or always helpful (57.1% and 56.3% respectively).

Of those respondents (15.1%) who used the transfer center staff services, 70.0% felt they were always or frequently helpful, 22.5% sometimes helpful and 7.5% felt they were never helpful. Although fairly high for all ethnic groups, there were some differences. African American respondents felt the transfer center staff was frequently or always helpful in higher proportions (83.3%) compared to white (68.5%) and Asian (69.2%) respondents. The proportion of Latino respondents who felt the Transfer Center staff was frequently or always helpful was 70.0%, while 75.0% of Native American responded that they were.

Of the 23.7% of respondents who used the learning center, a large majority of respondents (72.3%) felt the learning center tutors and staff members were always or frequently helpful, 21.7% felt they were

sometimes helpful, and 6.1% thought they were never helpful. The majority of Native American, African American and white respondents felt Learning Center tutors and staff are frequently or always helpful. In comparison, the Latino and Asian responses are fairly even distributed between the sometimes helpful and frequently/always helpful categories.

Survey respondents (31.2% who used the service) evaluated the library staff positively, with 70.7% suggesting that the library staff was always or frequently helpful, 25.7% responding they were sometimes helpful, and 3.6% responding that they were never helpful. A lower proportion of Asians (68.4%) and whites (68.4%) felt the Library staff was frequently or always helpful compared to the proportions in each of the other ethnic groups, which averaged 82.6%.

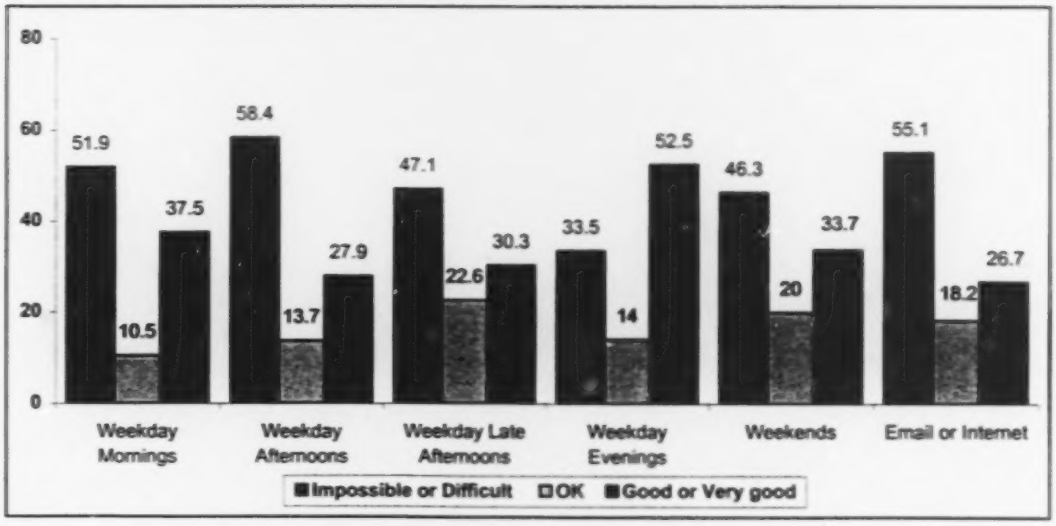
Of those survey respondents (27.3%) who used the services of the assessment center staff, 42.7% felt they were always helpful, 33.5% felt the staff was frequently helpful, 20.8% sometimes helpful, and 3.0% felt the assessment center staff was never helpful.

Respondent's Class Scheduling Preferences

The majority (60.0%) of survey respondents plan to take additional classes at one of the Los Rios colleges. Almost two-thirds have already registered, while 31.2% plan to take classes sometime in the future and 8.8% of respondents do not plan to take additional classes. Of particular interest is the higher proportion of Latinos who answered yes who have already registered (68.8%), compared to each of the other ethnic groups. The proportion of female respondents who have already registered is higher than the proportion of males, (63.6% compared to 53.7%). But, 36.7% of males responded that they do plan to take additional courses in the future.

As illustrated by Chart 7, evening classes are convenient to the largest number of students. Classes that would be scheduled during weekday evenings were considered good or very good by 52.5% of respondents. Weekday morning classes are good or very good for 37.5% of respondents, while weekend classes are considered good or very good by 33.7%. Weekday *late* afternoons are considered good or very good by 30.3%, while weekday afternoons are good or very good for a lower (27.9%) proportion of respondents. Courses conducted via e-mail or the internet are considered good or very good for 26.7% of survey respondents. As a very new media for course delivery, it is interesting to note that slightly more than one-fourth of the respondents would find courses by e-mail or internet to be good or very good in terms of their convenience.

Chart 7
Class Schedule Preferences of Survey Respondents



As shown in Chart 8, respondents prefer classes that meet two times a week (46.0%) in slightly higher proportions than classes that meet one time per week (33.9%). A higher proportion of white respondents (38.7%) prefer classes that meet one time per week, compared to each of the other ethnic categories which range from 20.0% to 24.1%.

Chart 8
Survey Respondent Preference for Number of Times Classes Meet Each Week

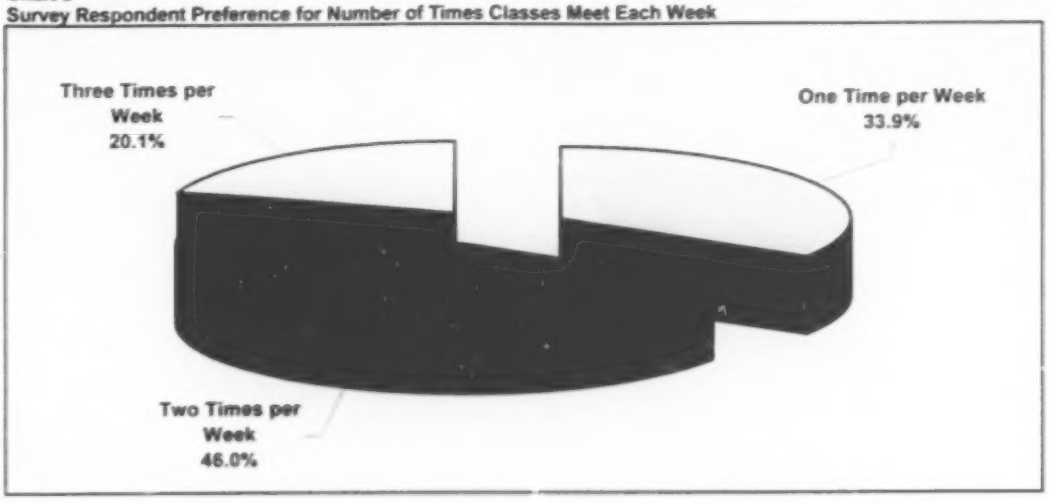
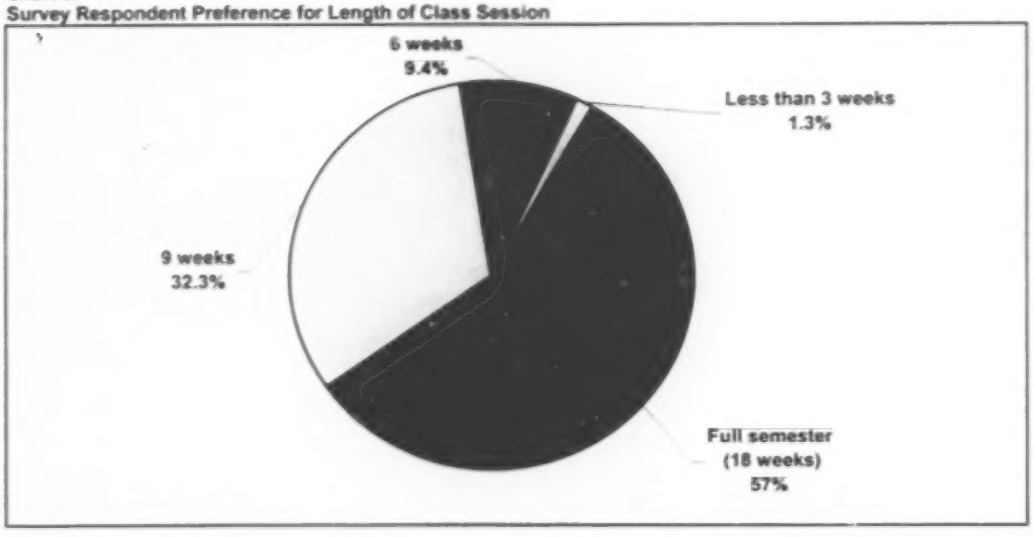


Chart 9 demonstrates that the majority of respondents (57.0%) prefer classes that last a full 18 week semester, while 32.3% prefer classes that last 9 weeks. Six week courses are preferred by 9.4% of respondents and 1.3% prefer courses that last less than 3 weeks.

Chart 9
Survey Respondent Preference for Length of Class Session



Of those who prefer the more traditional 18 week semester, 48.3% prefer classes that meet two times a week. Of the 32.3% of all respondents who prefer 9-week course offerings, almost half (45.9%) prefer courses that meet only once each week and 43.3% prefer courses that meet only twice each week. Only 10.8% of this group prefer classes that meet three times each week. This suggests that almost one-third of the respondents are very busy people, preferring to commit to a shorter 9-week term of course that meet one or two instead of three times each week.

Of the 1,323 survey respondents, 41.3% took the time to provide additional feedback on their Los Rios experience by completing the comment sheet that accompanied the survey. A summary of the student's comments is shown in Table 1. While the primary feedback focused on the respondent's future course taking plans (32.7% of all comments made), many students put forth a considerable amount of time in their written evaluation of their experience, concerns and educational goals. Several respondents who had criticism of the Los Rios system coupled their criticism with possible problem resolutions. An example is the student who was frustrated with the transcript ordering policy and recommended adding this procedure to the information provided on the grade report.

Table 1
Proportions of Comments by Type of Comment

Category	Percent
List of Courses	32.7%
Campus Preference	9.2%
Request Additional Courses	8.7%
Feedback on Experience: Positive	7.9%
Instructor Feedback: Negative	5.0%
Instructor Feedback: Positive	5.0%
Statement of Goals and Objectives	4.2%
Feedback on Experience: Negative	3.8%
Student Services	3.0%
Administration	2.9%
Facilities Complaint	2.8%
Schedule Additional Class Times	2.8%
Work Conflicts w/class schedule	2.4%
Instructor Feedback	1.9%
Schedule Conflict	1.8%
Parking Complaint	1.4%
Miscellaneous Comment	1.1%
Child Care Conflict	0.6%
Request Information	0.6%
No Comment	0.5%
Survey Complaint	0.5%
Facilities Compliment	0.4%
Feedback on Experience	0.4%
Workshop/Seminar Attendance Only	0.4%
Survey Compliment	0.1%
Total	100.0%

Additional comments covered a wide array of topics, from instructor feedback, to facilities concerns, to course scheduling, to the time it took to complete the survey. One student, who was over 65, complimented the District on availability of computer classes taught in a relaxing environment and added her family is very "proud" she did so well. A respondent who took a Health telecourse commented that the course was "very good and convenient."

Overall, the student's comments were quite positive with regard to their educational experience with Los Rios as exemplified in the following statement from a student:

> "I would like to thank you for your concern....The class I took helped me improve my entire life."

Summary Comments

- Because the rate of response is a low 14.0%, the survey results represent the opinions of only those students who did respond and can not be generalized to all new Spring 1997 students.
- Most respondents learned about classes from either schedules mailed to their home or obtained at college, center, or area bookstores.
- Respondents were quite satisfied with instruction (ranging from 78.7% to 86.6%) and support services (ranging from 66.5% to 80.1% of those who used the services).
- Over half of the survey respondents find evening classes convenient, about one-third like weekday mornings, late afternoons and weekends.
- A higher proportion of students (46.0%) prefer classes that meet two times per week.
- The majority of respondents (57.0%) prefer classes that last the traditional full 18 week semester.

This report was written by Betty Glyer-Culver, Research Analyst and is based on research conducted by the Spring 1997 New Student Survey staff: research/analytical design and project administration – Judith Beachler, Director of Institutional Research; analysis of data – Betty Glyer-Culver; computer support, database development and management – Minh La, Systems Hardware and Software Performance Analyst; and coordination of mailings and graphic design – Verna Puglisi.

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